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POLICY ISSUES

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Progress report on the Global Environment Outlook process

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report is submitted to inform the Governing Council of actions taken by UNEP to implement decision 19/3, which, inter alia, approved the continuation of the Global Environment Outlook process and requested the Executive Director to submit the next report in the Global Environment Outlook series (GEO-2) for the consideration of the Governing Council at its twentieth regular session. In response to this decision, the GEO process has been continued and strengthened and a tight production schedule has been followed since the nineteenth session of the Governing Council to prepare GEO-2.

In line with decisions taken by the Council on 7 February and 4 April 1997, GEO-2 was targeted for publication in May 1999, the originally scheduled date of the twentieth session of the Council. Owing to the length and complexity of the process of production of a comprehensive and authoritative global report of this nature, it was not possible to reschedule the production of GEO-2 to accommodate the subsequent alteration in the date of the session to February 1999. A summary of progress made towards the publication of GEO-2 in May 1999 is presented below.

* UNEP/GC.20/1.

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Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

Note with appreciation the broad participatory approach undertaken to prepare the second issue of Global Environment Outlook report;

Urge Governments and the Executive Director to take into account the findings and recommendations of the second Global Environment Outlook report in the development and implementation of their environmental assessment, management and policy actions and programmes;

Request the Executive Director to produce, in close collaboration with Governments, United Nations agencies and bodies, and collaborating and associated centres and experts, a third Global Environment Outlook report in the form of a "30 Years After Stockholm" report, to be launched in 2002, following the full participatory Global Environment Outlook approach;

Request the Executive Director to collaborate actively with the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the World Resources Institute and other relevant institutions in the preparation of the next issue of the World Resources Report, to be launched in December 2000, which will focus on the condition of and trends in global ecosystems and promote the concept of a comprehensive science-based assessment of the world's ecosystems;

Request the Executive Director to produce simultaneously an expert report on policy responses to changes in the ecosystems dealt with in the World Resources Report 2000;

Urge major actors in data compilation and in global report production, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Statistical Office, the United Nations regional commissions, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the World Resources Institute and the United Nations Environment Programme itself to collaborate in the production and use of a common data and knowledge base, comprising indicators, models, scenarios and expert systems, in order to avoid duplication, save cost and ensure that global reports are mutually supportive. Each agency would thus approach sustainable development from its particular perspective, while taking advantage of the information in the other reports to obtain a complete picture of sustainable development;

Request the Executive Director to direct the secretariat to play a catalytic role in bringing the various actors together, inter alia through its GEO working groups on data, modelling and scenario development.

A. Introduction

1. Work carried out by UNEP in response to Governing Council decision 19/3, entitled "Report on the Global Environment Outlook", involved the continuation of the Global Environment Outlook process, and in particular the preparation of the second Global Environment Outlook report - GEO-2.

B. The GEO process

2. UNEP has continued and strengthened the collaborative, region-based, global assessment process that forms the foundation for this series of reports. The network of Collaborating Centres currently consists of 22 institutes of excellence around the world. In comparison to GEO-1, the Collaborating Centres have been more actively involved in all stages of GEO-2 preparation to date, including planning, drafting and review of all the regional sections of the report and participation in the regional consultations. In addition, 11 Associated Centres have contributed to specific components of GEO-2, according to their areas of expertise. A list of Collaborating Centres and Associated Centres appears in annex I.

3. As for GEO-1, the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch mechanism has been used to solicit inputs from other United Nations agencies to GEO-2, either by providing substantive contributions to the report or by reviewing draft material. Considerable cooperation and guidance has been provided through this channel.

4. GEO Working Groups have continued to support the GEO process. The Steering Group for the GEO International Policy Working Group (PWG) held its first meeting in Tokyo from 9 to 11 March 1998. The meeting was jointly organized by UNEP and the Institute for Advanced Studies of the United Nations University with input from the Japanese National Institute for Environmental Studies and financial support from the Environment Agency of Japan. A modus operandi for the PWG was agreed and the GEO-2 draft, particularly the sections relevant to policy, reviewed. A proposed work plan for the PWG operation, starting with the inaugural meeting, is being prepared and funding is being sought.

5. A GEO Data Meeting was held at the Central European University in Hungary from 3 to 6 September 1998. Participants prepared a draft text on environmental data issues for GEO-2 and formulated recommendations for GEO-3 and the GEO process as a whole, as well as advising on data and graphics issues for the report. It is clear that solving some of the data problems will be a long-term process. GEO-2 will report on experience to date and will make some recommendations for the future.

6. The Global Scenario Group met in November 1998 and discussed, among other matters, the Group's possible future involvement in the development of an integrated data framework.

C. Preparations for GEO-2

7. Preparations for GEO-2 were initiated in February 1997, immediately after the nineteenth session of the Governing Council. The following steps have already been taken:

8. An inaugural meeting of the UNEP GEO Collaborating Centre Network was held in Groningen, the Netherlands, in March 1997, to begin planning for GEO-2 and to seek agreement on a preliminary work plan and timetable. The meeting was funded by the Dutch Government.

9. A consultation with government representatives on the framework for GEO-2, hosted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, was held in New York on 14 April 1997, during the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

10. A major planning meeting was held in Beijing in May 1997, hosted by China's National Environmental Protection Agency (now the State Environmental Protection Administration) and attended by representatives from all GEO Collaborating Centres and selected experts. The meeting discussed the implementation of the GEO-2 production process at the regional level and by Collaborating Centres, as well as the outline of the GEO-2 chapters, a work plan and time schedule for their preparation and long-term data and information activities. GEO-2 production guidelines were subsequently prepared to assist Collaborating Centres and others with report preparation.

11. The third major meeting for the production of GEO-2 took place at the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain in November 1997. The meeting focused on the drafting of regional sections of the report, especially for chapter 2, "State of the environment".

12. The fourth GEO-2 production meeting was held in Brazil in early February 1998, hosted by the Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (IBAMA). Agreement was reached on the finalization of the first GEO-2 draft, the preparation of the regional policy sections, and the strategy and background material to be produced for the regional policy consultations.

13. The reports of all four major GEO-2 production meetings have been published in the Meeting Report series issued by UNEP's Division of Environmental Information and Assessment, 1/ and can be made available to Governing Council participants on request.

14. A questionnaire devised by UNEP and the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) was sent out in August 1997 through SCOPE and the network of Collaborating Centres to some 250 environmental experts around the world to find out what they perceive as the most critical emerging issues for the twenty-first century. The results were used to develop the Outlook chapter of GEO-2.

15. For GEO-2 a more in-depth assessment of multilateral environmental agreements was suggested. Convention secretariats were involved in the planning and development of this component. To help gather information UNEP developed a comprehensive questionnaire on the structures and working modalities of environmental conventions and their secretariats. This

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1/ Now renamed the Division of Environmental Information, Assessment and Early Warning.

questionnaire was sent to all global convention secretariats, and replies were received from most of them. Inputs have been incorporated as appropriate in GEO-2, and a more detailed technical report may be prepared.

16. The first draft of the GEO-2 report, containing the regional sections for each GEO-2 chapter, was finalized in March 1998. Copies of the draft were distributed in early April 1998 for review before and during the regional policy consultations (see below) by Earthwatch members, by individual regional and sectoral experts and by all programmatic units and regional offices of UNEP.

17. GEO-2 regional policy consultations were held in all regions in May 1998, as follows:

- Africa - 25-27 May, Nairobi, hosted by UNEP;

- Asia and the Pacific

  - South Asia

    19 and 20 May, Kathmandu, hosted by UNEP, the Ministry of Population and Environment of Nepal (MoPE), the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD);

  - South-East Asia

    25 and 26 May, Bangkok, hosted by UNEP, the Environmental Research and Training Centre of Thailand (ERTC), the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion of Thailand (DEQP), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MoSTE) of Thailand and ASEAN;

  - Greater Mekong region

    27 May, Bangkok, hosted by UNEP, the Environmental Research and Training Centre of Thailand, the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion of Thailand (DEQP), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MoSTE) of Thailand and the Mekong River Commission;

  - North-West Pacific and East Asia

    28 May, Bangkok, hosted by UNEP;

- Europe (+ Arctic) - 4 and 5 May, Geneva, hosted by UNEP and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection;

- Latin America - 12-14 May, Santiago, Chile, hosted by UNEP, the Chilean Comisión Nacional del Medio Ambiente and UNDP;

- North America (+ Arctic) - 4 and 5 May, New York, hosted by UNEP;

- West Asia - 25-27 May, Damascus, hosted by UNEP, the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.

A 35-page booklet highlighting key issues and actions suggested in the first GEO-2 draft report was produced for the regional policy consultations to provide an introduction to the full document and to pinpoint topics for debate during the consultations.

18. The first GEO-2 draft has been revised on the basis of comments and inputs from the regional consultations and reviewers.

19. A European Union/UNEP project entitled "Global Environment Outlooks for the Lomé countries of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and South Pacific" was initiated in December 1997. Three inception meetings were held for the project:

- Indian Ocean - 4 and 5 May 1998, Mauritius;

- South Pacific - 8 and 9 June 1998, Fiji;

- Caribbean - 22-26 June 1998, Jamaica.

Draft reports are under preparation and will pass through a consultative review process, in line with the overall GEO assessment process, before publication. Subregional consultations are being held in November 1998 for the South Pacific, and in January 1999 for the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. Owing to delays which have occurred in this project, only a limited amount of material from the project will be incorporated in GEO-2.

20. Draft GEO-2 material is currently being edited and prepared for printing following the annotated outline presented in annex II. The report will go to the printer in April 1999. The launch of GEO-2 is scheduled for the end of May or early June 1999.

D. Other outputs

21. The GEO report series is providing the substance and basis for a number of additional UNEP outputs.

22. A 24-page booklet, "Where we stand: a state-of-the-environment overview for the Global Environment Facility", was prepared for the GEF Assembly held in New Delhi in April 1998. The booklet was based largely on GEO-1 and included a summary of the environmental situation, worldwide and in different regions, for the four GEF focal areas - climate change, the ozone layer, international waters and biodiversity - and for land and desertification as they relate to these focal areas.

23. UNEP and an international youth organization, Rescue Mission: Planet Earth, in association with UNICEF and UNESCO, are collaborating on a youth version of GEO. The "Endangered Planet" project is funded by the Turner Foundation and UNEP. Inputs are being produced by children from around the world, using GEO-1 and parts of GEO-2 as a basis. The end result will be a colourful, dynamic book full of poems, paintings, cartoons and case studies which will make the GEO report accessible to young people, reflect the regional and global environmental priorities of the young and report on the actions that young people consider of foremost importance to youth in the move to a more sustainable society. The book is scheduled to be launched in October 1999 at the Millennium Youth Conference in Hawaii. A CD-ROM game is also planned.

24. Several GEO technical background reports have been produced since the launch of GEO-1, as well as information notes on such topics as biodiversity-rich ecoregions that need protection, the use of spatial data sets for environmental assessment, approaches to an Earth audit and forest fires.

Annex I

(a) GEO-2 Collaborating Centres

Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Syrian Arab Republic
Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain
Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand
Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, Bangladesh
Central European University, Hungary
Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe, Egypt
European Environment Agency, Denmark
Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis, Brazil
International Institute for Sustainable Development, Canada
Moscow State University, Russia
National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan
National Institute of Public Health and Environmental Protection, Netherlands
Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa, Côte d'Ivoire
Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary
Southern African Research and Documentation Centre, Zimbabwe
State Environmental Protection Administration, China
Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden and United States of America
Tata Energy Research Institute, India
Thailand Environment Institute, Thailand
University of Chile, Sustainable Development Programme, Chile
University of Costa Rica, Development Observatory, Costa Rica
World Resources Institute, United States of America

(b) GEO-2 Associated Centres

Asociación Latinoamericana de Derecho Ambiental, Mexico
African Centre for Technology Studies, Kenya
Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, Colombia
Commission for Environmental Cooperation of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, Canada
Earth Council
National Environment Management Authority, Uganda
Regional Environment Programme-Indian Ocean Commission, Mauritius
Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment, France
South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Samoa
University of the West Indies, Jamaica
World Conservation Monitoring Centre, United Kingdom

Annex II

Tentative annotated contents for GEO-2 as of 16 November 1998

PRELIMINARY MATTER . . . . . 35 pages

GEO (sub-) regional divisions

will show the various subregions used in GEO-2 maps and country lists

GEO process

will briefly describe the GEO-2 production meetings held with the GEO-2 collaborating centres and review process including the regional consultations held with governments; will document the efforts undertaken to improve the use of regional data and the problems encountered due to the limited availability of internationally comparable data sets and illustrative material

Synthesis and recommendations . . . . . 14 pages

will summarize GEO-2, compare GEO-1 and GEO-2, highlight key issues requiring attention and give recommendations for policy action

CHAPTER 1 THE OVERALL PERSPECTIVE . . . . . 15 pages

"Non-environmental drivers"

will describe the activities in societies that drive the state of the environment in a usually negative direction, covering issues like population, economics, development, poverty, trade, tourism, industry, agriculture, etc.

CHAPTER 2 STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT . . . . . 160 pages

will describe the state of the environment based on recent global assessments made by international institutions, and on the regional assessments mainly prepared by the GEO-2 collaborating centres based on more region-specific knowledge. First a number of global issues are described, like ozone, climate change, El Niño, nitrogen loading, natural disasters, forest fires, chemicals and health, then moving into a regional synthesis of the environmental issues specifically covered in each regional section, dealing with land and food, forests, biodiversity, freshwater, marine and coastal areas, air and urban areas. This introductory section will be followed by specific regional sections as listed below. The main observation to be made in the SOE chapter is that despite international and national efforts to counter the negative trends in the state of the environment, it is still being degraded at an uncontrolled pace, though different environmental sectors are often being affected differently in various regions.

Global SOE plus synthesis of regional sections

Africa
socio-economic; land and food; forests; biodiversity; freshwater; marine and coastal areas; air; urban
Asia and the Pacific
Europe and Central Asia
Latin America and the Caribbean
North America
West Asia
Polar areas

CHAPTER 3 POLICY RESPONSES . . . . . 140 pages

will describe in general the broad range of policy instruments and responses that are available and applied; will describe difficulties in complying with and implementing policy instruments, resulting in often lower effectiveness than initially hoped for; will describe problems with actually assessing the effect of policy responses; will describe major global responses and synthesize the regional policy responses; will describe regional policy responses specifically per region; will describe the major barriers to implementation of policy instruments

Type of policy responses

Multilateral environmental agreements, non-binding agreements, institutions, laws/regulations (command and control), economic instruments, financial flows, cleaner production, information flow, participation

Implementation, compliance, and effectiveness of environmental instruments

Global policy responses plus synthesis of regional sections

Africa
historic context; global; regional; national
Asia and the Pacific
Europe and Central Asia
Latin America and the Caribbean
North America
West Asia
Polar areas

Conclusions (barriers to implementation)

CHAPTER 4 ENVIRONMENTAL OUTLOOK . . . . . 50 pages

will describe the results of a SCOPE survey implemented specifically for GEO-2 to identify issues that require more action; will report on alternative policy studies that were

carried out specifically by the GEO-2 collaborating centres, often using a scenario approach; will conclude with a section on suggestions for alternative policy action

The importance of the future

Priorities/action requirements for the twenty-first century as identified in GEO-2

Priorities/action requirements for the twenty-first century as identified through a global survey of scientists (SCOPE study)

Looking at the future through a scenario perspective

Back to GEO-1

Forward from GEO-1

From talking to acting

APPENDICES . . . . . 16 pages

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES . . . . . 416 pages